

14th SeSaMO Conference

PATHS OF RESISTANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITLE: Becoming activists in North Africa and the Middle East. Paths of political subjectivation during and after the Uprisings

CONVENORS: - Francesco Vacchiano
- Alice Elliot

ABSTRACT:

The events that shook the Arab-majority countries in 2011 have been scrutinized under a variety of angles: as a result of economic stagnation and authoritarianism, as an outcome of youth bulge, unemployment and frustration, as a response to old and new neoliberal experiments, as an effect of the new web-based social media, as a new cycle in a series of recurring revolutionary moments, as the cumulative upshot of a patient grass-roots construction, and more. While such perspectives are certainly relevant, each of them spotlighting some specific feature of the events, they focus mostly on social, economic and political dynamics, being individual motivation and choice often treated as mere consequences of structural factors. Far from dismissing the significance of historical and political dynamics, we aim to explore also the forms in which people understand the events and decide to step in and commit for a change. This is important to introduce a reflection on freedom and choice within a theorization often marked by social determinism.

Our panel welcomes contributions that illuminate the individual experience of activism, social and political participation and personal commitment in North Africa and the Middle East during and after the revolts of 2011. We are particularly interested in exploring people's motivations and decisions, continuities and discontinuities in their life experience, as well as their own understanding of activism, resistance, rebellion, engagement and politics. We ask in particular what are the events that trigger a change on a personal level, what are their consequences on a longer term and, more generally, how a new political subjectivity can emerge within a specific social context.

CONVENORS' ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Francesco Vacchiano is an anthropologist and a clinical psychologist with interests in migration, medical and psychological anthropology, European borders and boundaries, bureaucracies and politics of citizenship, and societies and institutions in North Africa. He has made research in Morocco, Tunisia and in Southern Europe and is currently studying the expectations related to activism and political participation in North Africa as the principal investigator of the project "Globally Sensitive: Revolt, Citizenship, and Expectations for the Future in North Africa", funded by the Portuguese research council ("Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia") (2015-2020).

Alice Elliot is a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she convenes the MA Migration and Mobility programme. She has been conducting ethnographic research since 2006 between North Africa and Europe on the social and intimate dimensions of migration and, more recently, on those of economic crisis and Arab revolutions. She works in Morocco, Tunisia, and Italy on themes of gender, kinship, and intimacy, Islam and theological/political imagination, hope and indigenous conceptions of movement. She is co-editor of *Methodologies of mobility: ethnography and experiment* (Berghahn 2017), and *Anthropologies of destiny: action, temporality, freedom* (HAU 2018).